

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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May 3, 2024

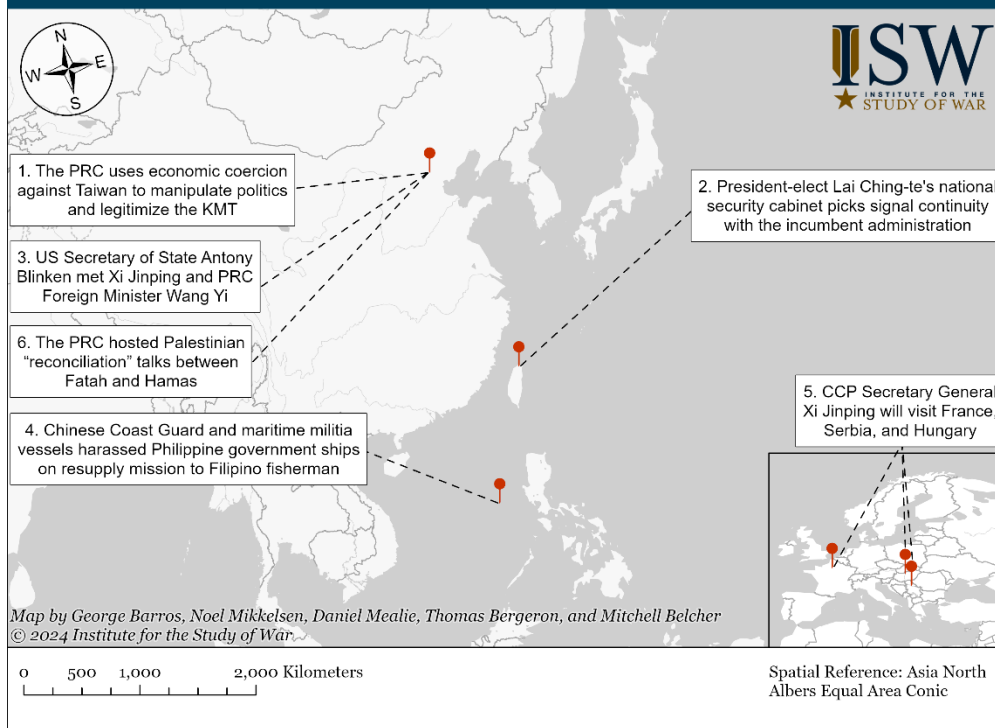
Data Cutoff: April 30 at 5pm ET

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update is a joint product from the Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute. The update supports the ISW–AEI Coalition Defense of Taiwan project, which assesses Chinese campaigns against Taiwan, examines alternative strategies for the United States and its allies to deter the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) aggression, and—if necessary—defeat the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The update focuses on the Chinese Communist Party’s paths to controlling Taiwan and cross–Taiwan Strait developments.

Key Takeaways

- The PRC eased cross-strait trade and travel restrictions after hosting a Kuomintang delegation. The PRC ended the trade bans after hosting the KMT delegation as a form of economic coercion that aims to reduce domestic support for the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan.
- President-elect Lai Ching-te announced his national security cabinet picks on April 25. The reshuffling of cabinet posts is telling of Lai’s intent to stay the course in cross-strait policy.
- The CCP signaled during US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit to the PRC the potential for cooperation in US-PRC relations while asserting that US actions—including economic measures against the PRC and support for Taiwan—risk competition and instability.
- The Chinese Coast Guard and Chinese Maritime Militia failed to block a Philippine Coast Guard resupply mission near Scarborough Shoal on April 30. This is the latest PRC effort to enforce the CCP’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.
- CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping will visit France, Serbia, and Hungary from May 5 to 10 as part of a charm offensive to build ties with the European states and block the formation of a stricter EU policy on China.
- The PRC hosted “reconciliation” talks between Fatah and Hamas in Beijing and endorsed the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority. Hosting the intra-Palestinian talks is a relatively low-cost, low-risk way for the PRC to bolster its diplomatic reputation and signal its intent to play an active diplomatic role in the Middle East.

China-Taiwan Update Political-Military Events (April 24 - April 30, 2024)



Cross-Strait Relations

The People's Republic of China (PRC) eased cross-strait trade and travel restrictions after hosting a Kuomintang (KMT) delegation. The PRC ended the trade bans after hosting the KMT delegation as a form of economic coercion that aims to reduce domestic support for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan. KMT Caucus Whip Fu Kun-chi traveled to the PRC on April 26, where he met with CCP officials throughout the weekend. Fu met with General Administration of Customs Deputy Director Zhao Zenglian on April 28. Zhao announced during the meeting that the PRC would lift its ban on imports of Wendan pomelos and two types of fish from Taiwan.[1] The PRC implemented the bans as a form of economic punishment after then-US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi arrived in Taiwan in August 2022.[2] The PRC's import bans significantly reduced income for Taiwanese exporters, as the PRC is an important export market for the banned goods, especially Wendan pomelos. The PRC accounted for over two-thirds of Taiwan's pomelo exports before the ban.[3] Director General of the Ruisui Township Farmers' Association Huang Sheng-huang claimed that the PRC accounted for 90% of Wendan pomelo exports from Hualien County, Fu Kun-Chi's district. [4]The change in CCP policy signals to farmers and fishermen in Taiwan that they stand to benefit from the KMT's cross-strait engagements and lose from the DPP's.

Fu also met with Ministry of Culture and Tourism Vice Minister Rao Quan the same day, during which Rao announced the PRC would allow Fujian residents to travel to Taiwan's Matsu islands again.[5] The Matsu Islands make up an archipelago close to the PRC coast. Representatives from the agriculture and travel industries have called for the ROC government to reciprocate the PRC's loosening. Chairman of the Travel Agent Association of Taiwan Hsiao Bo-ren urged Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC)

to respond in kind.[6] A program on the PRC state-run China Central Radio and Television posted on its WeChat on April 30, calling on the DPP to lift restrictions to allow tourism to return to normal and stop obstructing cross-strait exchanges.[7]

The PRC's use of economic bargaining chips to influence Taiwan's politics is not new. The PRC ended its suspension of Taiwanese grouper imports in December 2023, two weeks before the presidential election, citing action from the KMT to address quality concerns.[8] KMT Vice Chairman Andrew Hsia, who has held numerous meetings with CCP officials since assuming his role in 2021, travelled to the mainland earlier that year to lobby for an end to the import suspension.[9] TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian accredited the successful negotiations to the CCP and KMT's mutual recognition of the 1992 Consensus, which the DPP does not recognize. The 1992 Consensus states that both sides agree there is only one China, and that Taiwan is part of the only China. The CCP claims that China is the PRC, while the KMT simply acknowledges the differences in interpretations of "one China."

Fu met with Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Director Song Tao and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman Wang Huning on April 27. Wang stated that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the Chinese nation and expressed hope for greater cross-strait exchanges.[10] Fu echoed Wang's sentiments and advocated for greater cooperation between the CCP and KMT on their "common political basis." [11] Wang's role as CPPCC chairman, which is a leading United Front organization, and as deputy leader of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs make him one of the top CCP officials responsible for overseeing the PRC's policy toward Taiwan. TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian also stated on April 27 that the PRC is willing to donate prefabricated houses to Hualien County, where a recent earthquake wrought extensive damage.[12]

Taiwan

President-elect Lai Ching-te announced his national security cabinet picks on April 25. Old hands from President Tsai Ing-wen's cabinet comprise the picks, although they will serve in different capacities. National Security Council (NSC) Secretary-General Wellington Koo will head Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) and current Foreign Minister Joseph Wu will replace Koo at the NSC. Lin Chia-lung, the current Secretary General to the President and former ambassador-at-large for Taiwan's digital New Southbound Policy initiatives, will head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Former deputy minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) and current vice chairman of the Straits Exchange Foundation Chiu Chui-cheng will become minister of the MAC. National Security Bureau (NSC) Director General Tsai Ming-yen will remain in his post.

The reshuffling of cabinet posts is telling of Lai's intent to stay the course in cross-strait policy. During a presidential candidate debate in December, Lai praised Tsai In-wen's diplomatic line and touted his qualifications to continue her policy, being her vice president.[13] The PRC regards the DPP as a separatist party that wants to pursue formal Taiwanese statehood (as opposed to the Republic of China) and suspended diplomatic communication with the DPP government in 2016. TAO Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian described Taiwan independence workers as "war makers" during the election season, referring to Lai.[14] The TAO responded to Lai's victory in the January presidential election by condemning the DPP's "separatist plots" and vowing to resist the DPP's "independence provocations." [15] Lai previously described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence" during his premiership in 2017, but later stated that there was no need to formally declare Taiwan's independence from the ROC.[16]

China

The CCP signaled during US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit to the PRC the potential for cooperation in US-PRC relations while asserting that US actions—including economic measures against the PRC and support for Taiwan—risk competition and instability. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping and PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi in separate meetings during his trip to the PRC on April 26. Xi’s comments in the PRC readout largely took a positive tone about US-PRC relations. Xi said the two countries should be partners, not rivals, and that they should engage in win-win cooperation and implement the “San Francisco Vision” of his and US President Joe Biden’s meeting in November 2023. Xi said the PRC is willing to cooperate, but cooperation must go both ways; that the PRC is not afraid of competition, but competition should be about common progress and not a zero-sum game; and that the PRC does not form alliances and the United States likewise should not form “small circles” – a reference to US-led multilateral regional partnerships that exclude and target the PRC.[17] Wang Yi also praised the San Francisco meeting and said that US-PRC relations have “generally stopped declining and stabilized.” His remarks focused far more than Xi’s on accumulating “negative factors” in the relationship, however. Wang urged the United States to stop arming Taiwan, refrain from sending “wrong signals” to Taiwan “separatists,” and not use Taiwan as a tool to contain China. Wang also criticized the United States for “endless measures to suppress China’s economy, trade, science and technology.” He said it should stop promoting the “false narrative” of PRC “overcapacity” and lift “illegal sanctions” and tariffs. Wang finally stressed that the Asia-Pacific should “not become a battleground for major powers.” He urged the United States to stop “forming small circles,” stop “coercing” countries in the region to choose sides and stop deploying intermediate-range missiles to the region.[18]

A PRC readout claimed that Wang and Blinken’s meeting produced a five-point consensus. The consensus included agreements to 1. Stabilize and develop US-PRC relations in accordance with the San Francisco “consensus;” 2. Maintain exchanges at all levels and in newly established consultation mechanisms in various fields, including military, drugs, climate change, and AI; 3. Hold a variety of dialogues including the first China-US Intragovernmental Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence, dialogues on Asia-Pacific Affairs, US-PRC military affairs, and consular consultations; 4. Embrace people-to-people and cultural exchanges; 5. Continue consultations on international and regional hotspot issues.[19] The US readout about the meeting did not reference any five-point consensus, however. It said Blinken and Wang discussed the next steps for advancing cooperation on counternarcotics, military-to-military communication, talks on artificial intelligence risks and safety, and facilitating people-to-people exchanges.[20]

The PRC responded to Blinken’s accusations that the PRC provided dual-use goods to Russia by accusing the United States of denigrating its “normal trade with Russia” and “aggravating the crisis” through aid to Ukraine. Blinken raised the issue of PRC provision to Russia of dual-use components and machine tools during his meetings with top PRC officials.[21] He said in an interview after his trip that the PRC is providing “invaluable support to Russia’s defense industrial base” which is helping Russia overcome the effects of sanctions and export controls.[22] An MFA spokesperson claimed the PRC has “never done anything to fan the flames or seek profit from the crisis.” He said the PRC’s “right to normal trade and economic exchanges” with countries including Russia should not be interfered with. He also noted US military aid to Ukraine and remarked that it is clear “who exactly is fueling the flame and aggravating the crisis.”[23] The PRC readouts of Blinken’s

meetings with Xi Jinping and Wang Yi did not mention the issue of PRC support for Russia’s defense industry.[24]

The PRC expressed muted opposition following the passage of a US law to force the sale or ban of TikTok in the United States. US President Joe Biden signed a bill on April 24 to force TikTok’s PRC parent company ByteDance to fully divest from TikTok within 270 days or face a ban in the United States.[25] An MFA spokesperson responded to the ban on the day it passed by saying the MFA had already expressed its “principled position” on the issue.[26] The MFA previously expressed its strong opposition to a TikTok “divest or ban” bill on March 14. It accused the United States of overstretching the concept of “national security” to hinder foreign competition, said the attempt to force the sale of TikTok was based on “sheer robbers’ logic,” warned that the US moves would eventually backfire, and claimed the US government has never found evidence that TikTok poses a national security threat.[27] TikTok called the law unconstitutional and said it would fight the legislation in US courts.[28]

Northeast Asia

Japan

The Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) confronted a delegation of Japanese officials en route to inspect the Senkaku Islands on April 27. The PRC Embassy in Japan said on April 28 that the CCG carried out unspecified “law enforcement measures” and that the PRC lodged “stern representations” with the Japanese government.[29] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Linjian reiterated PRC claims on April 27 that the Japanese-administered Senkakus, what the PRC refers to as Diaoyu Dao, are PRC territory.[30] The delegation of Japanese officials included Defense Minister Tomomi Inada and a member of the Japanese Diet.[31]

The PRC did not increase the number of CCG vessels operating in the vicinity of the Senkakus to confront the Japanese delegation. Four CCG vessels operated in the Senkaku Islands on April 27.[32] This is consistent with the trend of CCG incursions of between two and four vessels occurring daily in Senkaku Island waters since April 2023. Up to eight CCG vessels routinely intrude into the Senkaku Island waters on the first of every month.[33] The intent of these incursions is to exert the PRC’s claims of sovereignty over the Senkakus.

Southeast Asia

Philippines

The Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) and Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) failed to block a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) resupply mission near Scarborough Shoal on April 30. This is the latest PRC effort to enforce the CCP’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.[34] The CCG deployed four ships, the CMM deployed six ships, and the PCG and BFAR deployed two ships.[35] The CCG and CMM vessels hit the PCG and BFAR vessels eight times with high-pressure water cannons and rammed the vessel three times. The PCG ship suffered damage to its superstructure while the BFAR suffered minimal hull and electrical damage.[36] The Philippines’ resupply mission was successful, nonetheless.[37] The CCG also reinstalled a floating barrier covering the entrance of Scarborough Shoal on April 30 to prevent Philippine ships from accessing the shoal.[38] The CCG

previously placed this barrier at Scarborough Shoal on September 20, 2023, and February 22, 2024, which the PCG then removed.[39]

The harassment is consistent with ongoing CCG actions to enforce PRC territorial claims inside the nine-dash line. The PRC rejected a 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that declared the nine-dash line territorial claims unlawful.[40] The PRC has normalized CCG harassment of the PCG and supply ships near the Second Thomas Shoal, also a prominent feature inside the nine-dash line, since December 2023 to render the Philippines unable and unwilling to defend its claim to the Second Thomas Shoal. The CCG harassed the PCG and associated supply ships six times at the Second Thomas Shoal between November 2021 and November 2023.[41] The number of such incidents at the Second Thomas Shoal has nearly doubled since December 1, 2023. The methods of harassment that the CCG employs have remained constant during the past three years. The CCG shines military-grade lasers to blind the PCG crews, sprays water cannons to immobilize supply ships and injure Filipino sailors, and rams PCG ships.[42]

The CCP used a similar strategy in 2012 that resulted in the Philippines withdrawing from the Scarborough Shoal, indicating the party's intent with CCG activity around disputed shoals is to gain and enforce control of that territory. The CCP engaged in negotiations with the Philippines in 2012 to end a standoff at the Scarborough Shoal, which Manila administered at the time, while steadily increasing the number of Chinese Coast Guard ships near the shoal.[43] This resulted in the Philippines withdrawing its ships from the shoal in mid-June 2012 under a now-disputed agreement that the PRC would do the same.[44] The CCP subsequently kept its ships near the shoal and achieved its political objective of gaining de facto control of the Scarborough Shoal by July 2012.[45]

CCP-controlled media outlets portrayed the United States-Philippines Exercise Balikatan 2024 as a threat to regional stability. The exercise runs from April 22 to May 10 and will include test missions across all domains, including a Philippine-US-French trilateral naval exercise in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).[46] The naval exercises will occur in the Philippines' EEZ rather than territorial waters because France and the Philippines have not yet completed a visiting forces agreement.[47] The party-controlled *Xinhua* and *People's Daily* media outlets framed the exercise as a bellicose provocation that destabilizes the region.[48]

Europe

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping will visit France, Serbia, and Hungary from May 5 to 10 as part of a charm offensive to build ties with the European states and block the formation of a stricter EU policy on China. The Xi-Macron meetings will include discussions of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas War and Sino-French trade and scientific cooperation.[49] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement emphasized the necessity of avoiding "confrontation between camps" and the desire for France to push the EU to "pursue a positive and pragmatic policy towards China." [50] *Bloomberg* also reported that the EU is considering additional restrictions on PRC companies for supporting Russia.[51]

The PRC claimed that European governments are manufacturing fears of a "China spy threat" after Germany and the United Kingdom arrested several individuals for spying for the PRC. [52] Germany arrested three German nationals on April 22 who prosecutors said are "strongly suspected of having worked for a Chinese secret service since an unspecified date before June 2022." The prosecutors said that the individuals supplied the PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS)

with information about military technology, including machine parts for the operation of powerful ship engines and a “special laser.”[53] Germany arrested an aide to far-right PRC-friendly German MEP Maximilian Krah on April 23 on suspicion of being an “employee of a Chinese secret service” and spying on “Chinese opposition figures” in Germany.[54] A PRC spokesperson on April 26 claimed Germany’s espionage cases were “completely fabricated.” The PRC summoned the German ambassador to lodge protests.[55] The UK also arrested two people it accused of spying for the PRC on April 26.[56] The PRC embassy in the UK called the UK spy cases “malicious slander” and “anti-China political manipulation.”[57]

The PRC has used spies in Europe to monitor and influence European policy toward the PRC. An investigation by European media Der Spiegel, Financial Times, and Le Monde published in December 2023 found that an MSS agent named Daniel Woo directed former far-right Belgian MP Frank Creyelman from 2019 to 2022 to report on confidential meetings in the European Parliament, attack the reputations of “anti-China” politicians and activists, and spread pro-PRC narratives on issues such as Covid-19, the PRC repression of Uighurs, and pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. European intelligence services also identified Woo as the PRC contact of other far-right and pro-Russia European politicians as well as a recruiter of spies in countries including Germany and Poland. [58]

Russia and Iran

PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun’s speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on April 26 called on member states to be a model for “unity and cooperation” amidst current instability in global governance. He emphasized the necessity of security so that member states may effectively develop in a stable environment.[59] Dong also engaged in a flurry of meetings at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting on April 26 in Astana, Kazakhstan. He met with defense ministers of Pakistan, Russia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to discuss the international security situation and unspecified “issues of common concern.”[60] Dong’s April 26 meeting with Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad Ashtiani occurred after PRC Special Envoy for Middle Eastern Affairs Zhai Jun met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri on April 25 in Moscow to discuss “the situation in the Middle East.”[61]

Israel-Hamas War

The PRC hosted “reconciliation” talks between Fatah and Hamas in Beijing and endorsed the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority. The PRC invited representatives of Fatah and Hamas to Beijing on April 26 to negotiate “intra-Palestinian reconciliation” between the two major factions.[62] A PRC MFA spokesperson said on April 30 that the two sides “expressed their political will to achieve reconciliation through dialogue and consultation, discussed many specific issues and made positive progress, and unanimously agreed to continue this dialogue process and strive for the early realization of Palestinian unity and reunification.”[63] Another MFA spokesperson said on April 26 that the PRC supports strengthening the authority of the Palestinian Authority (PA).[64] PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi laid out the PRC position in an interview published the same day as the talks. Wang said the PRC supports an immediate ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian assistance to Gaza, preventing regional escalation, and correcting “historical injustice” to the Palestinian people by promoting reconciliation between Palestinian factions and establishing an independent State of Palestine with UN membership.[65] The April 26 talks followed PRC MFA envoy Wang Kejian’s trip around the Middle East from March 10-17, which included meetings with PA and Israeli officials and

the PRC's first publicly acknowledged meeting with Hamas since its terror attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023.[66] The PRC has never directly criticized Hamas.

The PRC's hosting of and statements about intra-Palestinian negotiations reflect its intent to play an active diplomatic role in the resolution of the Gaza war and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The talks also serve the propaganda purpose of portraying the PRC as an important and responsible mediator in the conflict in contrast to the United States. The PRC has repeatedly criticized Israel's military operations in Gaza and US support for Israel while calling for an internationally mediated ceasefire.[67]

Hosting the intra-Palestinian talks is a relatively low-cost, low-risk way for the PRC to bolster its diplomatic reputation. A failure to bring about Fatah-Hamas reconciliation would amount to maintenance of the status quo and would not draw significant criticism of the PRC. A success in the negotiations, which is very unlikely, would present an opportunity for the PRC to embellish its reputation in a similar way to the Beijing-mediated Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement in March 2023. The PRC said after the Saudi-Iran negotiations that "China has no selfish interests in the Middle East, respects the status of the Middle East countries as its masters, and opposes geopolitical competition in the Middle East... China will continue to contribute Chinese wisdom and put forward Chinese suggestions to achieve peace and tranquility in the Middle East, and play its role as a responsible great power." [68]

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